Respect, Family, Power and Pacific Culture

Keeping at-risk Pacific Islander young people out of the juvenile justice system by engaging them in an exploration of their culture and identity is the aim of a pilot program launched by Sydney Local Health District’s Youthblock Youth Health Service.

Youthblock Manager Michelle Lampis said research has indicated that the loss of culture is a factor in the over representation of Pacific Islander young people in the juvenile justice system.

“Young people with a healthy self-esteem and sense of identity are more likely to make positive choices”, Ms Lampis said.

“The Pacific Youth Identity Project will also aim to reduce the rates of drug and alcohol misuse and sexually transmitted infections, by encouraging and fostering healthy behaviour and relationships”, she said.

“Islander populations place a high value on the roles of family, clan, religion, community and a heavy emphasis on respect for elders and others, so it is important we encourage young people to identify with their heritage.”

The program was launched during an open day at Marrickville Youth Resource Centre – with the help of traditional foods, music and art – and the screening of a short documentary.

The film follows several people from the Pacific Islander community, and explores their stories of migration, culture and life in Australia.

The Respect, Family, Power and Pacific Culture DVD will be used in small group sessions during the Pacific Youth Identity Project, to promote discussion about culture and heritage, and examine how this can strengthen and enrich young peoples’ lives.

Background Information:

- In 2006 Pacific Islanders made up 1.1% of the NSW population, but constituted 7% of juvenile offenders on community based orders.
- In 2010 Pacific Islander was the highest represented ethnic group in the list of violent offenders on remand.
- The Pacific Youth Identity Project is an initiative of Youthblock Youth Health Service in collaboration with the Australia Museum, Petersham Juvenile Justice, NSW Council for Pacific Communities and the Pacific Communities Committee.